



Understanding Your Warfarin Therapy

What is Warfarin?

Warfarin is an anticoagulant drug that reduces the ability of blood to clot.

The aim of Warfarin treatment is to prevent thrombosis (formation of blood clot).

You should be well informed about your treatment including why you are on it, the possible side effects and what can cause your blood levels to go up or down.

Your doctor will be able to assist you with any questions you may have.

Why are you taking Warfarin?

Your doctor has prescribed Warfarin for one of the following conditions:

- Blood clots in the limbs, Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)
- Blood clots in the lung, Pulmonary Embolus (PE)
- Blood clots in the heart
- After surgery to prevent clots
- Heart rhythm irregularity such as atrial fibrillation
- At risk or recovering from stroke
- At risk or recovering from heart attack
- Heart valve replacement or repair (Aortic and Mitral Valves)

Commencing Treatment on Warfarin

Blood tests are required to manage your blood levels of Warfarin and enable dosage adjustment if required. At first blood tests will be done every day or two. When the blood level is stable tests will become monthly.

Should you no longer be required to take Warfarin, your doctor will inform you when and how to stop treatment.

Types of Drugs, Sizes & Brands

Warfarin is the most commonly used oral anticoagulant. The two most common brands of Warfarin are Marevan and Coumadin. They are taken once a day. A less common drug is Dindevan, which is taken twice daily.

Warfarin is available in 1, 3 and 5mg tablets (Marevan) or 1, 2 and 5mg (Coumadin) tablets. Each strength tablet is a different colour. Tablets can be broken in half to obtain the required dose, for example a dose of 0.5mg can be achieved by breaking a 1mg tablet in half.

Please do not break the 5mg tablets.

Coumadin



Light tan 1mg



Lavender 2mg



Green 5mg

Marevan



Brown 1mg



Blue 3mg



Pink 5mg

INR (International Normalised Ratio)

You may hear your Warfarin treatment result referred to as an INR. This is the name of the laboratory blood test. Your required INR level will be determined by your doctor and it will be in the range of 1.5 – 4.0.

Managing my Warfarin Treatment

It is important you

- take the exact dose prescribed
- take your dose at approximately the same time each day, preferably in the evening
- take the same brand of Warfarin
- have your blood test early in the morning - preferably by 10.00am.
This gives the laboratory enough time to make results available on the same day.
- inform your doctor and laboratory of any changes in your health, medication, lifestyle, sickness, dental procedures or hospitalisation
- listen very carefully when you are told what dose to take. If you are not certain – **PLEASE ASK**
- **have the blood test when it is due, do not delay it.**

Communication and cooperation are vital for good management.

At each visit for your Warfarin testing you will be asked the following questions:

Please answer each question carefully and accurately.

1. What is your current dose?
2. Have you missed any recent doses?
3. Has there been any alteration in your dose?
4. Have you started or ceased any medications, particularly antibiotics?
5. Have you had any bleeding or bruising?
6. Have you had any recent medical problems?

If you think of anything else that may be important – tell the collector.

What can affect my Warfarin levels?

Many things can affect your Warfarin levels and they include:

- Starting certain new medication or stopping old ones (see next column)
- Sickness, especially if not eating for a few days
- Alcohol
- Changes in diet
- Changes in exercise levels
- Significant weight loss or gain
- Fever/Infections

Maintaining a steady state of food, alcohol and exercise helps to stabilise the Warfarin control.

If you begin any new medications you should inform the doctor adjusting your Warfarin dose. It may be necessary for extra blood tests and/or a change in the Warfarin dose.

Medications that most commonly cause problems:

- Antibiotics
- Anticonvulsants
- Heart arrhythmia drugs mainly Amiodrone, Cordorone, Aratac
- Chemotherapy
- Treatment for Peptic Ulcer
- Treatment for Cholesterol
- Some herbal supplements

Side effects of Warfarin

The most common side effect of Warfarin is bleeding and bruising. **Inform your doctor immediately if you are experiencing bleeding/bruising or think you may be bleeding internally.**

Other uncommon side effects include skin rashes, jaundice, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and hair loss.

Activities to be avoided while taking Warfarin include contact sports like football and boxing and those with potential for traumatic injury.

What if I miss a dose of Warfarin?

If you remember within 3-4 hours, then take the dose on the same day. If you are unsure or remember after this time, then take your normal dose on the following day.

Do not take a double dose in order to make up for a missed dose.

What should I do if I am pregnant?

The use of Warfarin in pregnancy is to be avoided. If you are on Warfarin and are planning to become pregnant you must discuss this with your doctor. Warfarin can cause abnormality in the baby if taken early in pregnancy and alternative therapy is required.

What if I need surgery or dental work?

It is most important that you tell the person doing the surgery or dental work that you are on Warfarin. The doctor looking after your Warfarin should be told about the procedure before it is done.

Your doctor or dentist will tell you whether the Warfarin dose needs to be stopped or changed.

For further
information

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